

And wel ye woot no vileynye is it.
 Eek Plato seith, whoso that kan hym rede,
 The wordes moote be cosy to the dede.
 Also I prey yow to foryeve it me,
 Al have I nat set folk in hir degree
 Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde;
 Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde;
 My wit is short, ye may wel understonde.

GREET chiere made oure hoost us
 everichon,
 And to the soper sette he us anon,
 And served us with vitaille at the
 beste.
 Strong was the wyn, & wel to drynke
 us leste.

The
 hooste

SEMELY man oure hooste was
 withalle
 for to han been a marchal in an halle.
 A large man he was with eyen stepe,
 A fairer burgeys was ther noon in
 Chepe;

Boold of his speche, and wys and well ytaught,
 And of manhod hym lakkede right naught.
 Eek therto he was right a myrie man,
 And after soper pleyen he bigan,
 And spak of myrthe amonges othere thynges,
 Whan that we hadde maad our rekenynges;
 And seyde thus. Now lordynges, trewely,
 Ye been to me right welcome hertely;
 for by my trouthe, if that I shal nat lye,
 I saugh nat this yer so myrie a campaigne
 Atones in this herberwe as is now;
 fayn wolde I doon yow myrthe, wiste I how.
 And of a myrthe I am right now bythoght,
 To doon yow ese, and it shal coste noght.
 Ye goon to Canterbury, God yow speede,
 The blisful martir quite yow youre meede.
 And wel I woot as ye goon by the weye
 Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye;
 for trewely, confort ne myrthe is noon
 To ride by the weye doun as the stoon;
 And therfore wol I maken yow disport,
 As I seyde erst, and doon yow som confort.
 And if yow liketh alle, by oon assent,
 How for to stonden at my juggement,
 And for to werken as I shal yow seye,
 Comorwe, whan ye riden by the weye,
 Now by my fader soule that is deed,
 But ye be myrie, I wol yeve yow myn heed.
 Hoold up youre hond, withouten moore speche.
 Oure conseil was nat longe for to seche;
 As thoughte it was noght worth to make it wys,
 And graunted hym withouten moore avys,
 And bad him seye his vordit as hym leste.
 Lordynges, quod he, now herkne for the beste,
 But taak it nought, I prey yow, in desdeyn;
 This is the poynt, to speken short and pleyn,
 That eche of yow, to shorte with oure weye,
 In this viage shal telle tales tweye,
 To Caunterburyward, I mene it so,
 And homward he shal tellen othere two,
 Of adventures that whilom han bifalle.
 And which of yow that bereth hym best of alle,
 That is to seyn, that telleth in this caas
 Tales of best sentence and moost solas,

Shal have a soper at oure aller cost
 Heere in this place, sittynge by this post,
 Whan that we come agayn fro Caunterbury.
 And for to make yow the moore myrie,
 I wol myselve goodly with yow ryde
 Right at myn owene cost, and be youre gyde,
 And whoso wole my juggement withseye,
 Shal paye al that we spenden by the weye.
 And if ye vouchesauf that it be so,
 Tel me anon, withouten wordes mo,
 And I wol erly shape me therfore.
 This thyng was graunted, and oure othes swore
 With ful glad herte, and preyden hym also
 That he would vouchesauf for to do so,
 And that he wolde been oure governour,
 And of our tales juge and reportour,
 And sette a soper at a certeyn pris;
 And we wol reuled been at his devys
 In heigh and lough; and thus by oon assent,
 We been accorded to his juggement.
 And therupon the wyn was fet anon;
 We dronken, and to reste wente echon
 Withouten any lenger tarynge.

MORWE, whan that day gan for to
 sprynge,
 Up roos oure hoost and was oure
 aller cok,
 And gadrede us togidre alle in a flok,
 And forth we riden, a litel moore than

paas,
 Unto the wateryng of Seint Thomas;
 And there oure hoost bigan his hors areste,
 And seyde. Lordynges, herkne if yow leste:
 Ye woot youre forward, and I it yow recorde.
 If evensong and morwesong accorde,
 Lat se now who shal telle the firste tale.
 As evere mote I drynke wyn or ale,
 Whoso be rebel to my juggement
 Shal paye for al that by the wey is spent.
 Now draweth cut, er that we ferrer twynne;
 He which that hath the shorteste shal bigynne.
 Sire Knyght, quod he, my mayster and my lord,
 Now draweth cut, for that is myn accord.
 Cometh neer, quod he, my lady Prioressse,
 And ye, sire Clerk, lat be your shamefastnesse,
 Ne studieth noght; ley hond to, every man.
 Anon to drawn every wight bigan,
 And shortly for to tellen as it was,
 Were it by aventure, or sort, or cas,
 The sothe is this, the cut fil to the knyght,
 Of which ful blithe and glad was every wyght;
 And telle he moste his tale as was resoun,
 By forward and by composicioun,
 As ye han herd; what nedeth wordes mo?
 And whan this goode man saugh it was so,
 As he that wys was and obedient
 To kepe his forward by his free assent,
 He seyde. Syn I shal bigynne the game,
 What, welcome be the cut, a Goddes name!
 Now lat us ryde, and herkne what I seye.
 And with that word we ryden forth oure weye;
 And he bigan with right a myrie cheere
 His tale anon, and seyde in this manere.

Heere endith the prolog of this book.

HEERE BIGYNNECH THE KNYGHTES TALE
 TANQUE DOMOS PATRIAS, SCITHICE POST ASPERA GENTIS PROELIA
 L'ADRIGERO, et cetera (Stat. Theb. xii. 519.)



AS OLDE STORIES TELLEN US,
 Ther was a duc that highte Theseus;
 Of Atthenes he was lord and governour,
 And in his tyme swich a conquerour,
 That gretter was ther noon under the sonne.

ful many a riche contree hadde he wonne;
 That with his wysdom and his chivalrye
 He conquered al the regne of femeny,
 That whilom was ycleped Scithia;
 And weddede the queene Ypolita,
 And broghte hire boom with hym in his contree
 With muchel glorie and greet solemnytee,
 And eek hir faire suster Emelye.
 And thus with victorie and with melodye
 Lete I this noble duc to Atthenes ryde,
 And at his hoost, in armes hym bisyde.
 And certes, if it nere to long to heere,
 I wolde have toold yow fully the manere,
 How wonnen was the regne of femeny
 By Theseus, and by his chivalrye;
 And of the grete bataille for the nones
 Bitwixen Atthenes and Amazones;
 And how asseged was Ypolita,
 The faire hardy queene of Scithia;
 And of the feste that was at hir weddyng,
 And of the tempest at hir boom comyng;
 But al that thyng I moot as now forbere.
 I have, God woot, a large feeld to ere,
 And wayke been the oxen in my plough.